

EMPAG Application Review After-Action Summary

I. INTRODUCTION

The Emergency Management Preparedness Assistance Grant (EMPAG) program was authorized by the Washington State Legislature in the State Fiscal Year 2007 budget. \$1.6 million was earmarked for this competitive grant, and identified eligible applicants as local governments, tribal governments, regional agencies, regional incident management teams and private organizations. The grant program provides funding for high impact, short term emergency preparedness projects.

The three-week application period opened on May 17 and closed on June 5, 2006. A total of 89 applications were received, totaling \$8,492,363. A breakdown of the applicant demographics follows:

- 11 private organizations
- 61 local governments
- 5 tribal governments
- 12 regional agencies

Applications were evaluated by a peer review panel consisting of federal and state reviewers with knowledge and expertise in emergency management. A total of 30 awards were announced on June 29, 2006.

II. REVIEW PROCESS

The peer review panel evaluated 8 sections in each EMPAG application. Each section had a pre-determined maximum point value as explained in the grant guidance. The sections included:

1. Need (15 points)
2. Project Description (20 points)
3. Performance Measures (10 points)
4. Impact (20 points)
5. Governance (5 points)
6. Sustainability/Maintainability (5 bonus points)
7. Work Plan (20 points)
8. Budget (10 points)

To assign a point value to each part of the application, the review panel evaluated how well the application answered specific questions related to that section.

For example, in the “Need” section of the application, the review panel examined whether the application provided information about who the target population for the project was and what the applicant’s rationale was for serving that population.

In the “Project Description” section, for example, the review panel evaluated whether the proposed project appeared to have a realistic timeframe for the 10-month performance period and whether the expected deliverables were clearly identified, among other criteria.

In the “Impact” section, for example, the review panel evaluated whether the proposed project was high-impact and would fundamentally improve the situation for the target population.

Each section was examined and scored based on how well the application addressed the requirements of each category as outlined in the grant guidance. Scores were assigned based on how well questions in each section were addressed and how well the project information was explained.

Following is a summary of some common characteristics which scored well as well as areas which consistently resulted in lower scores throughout the review process.

III. SUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS

Applications that scored well were clear and to the point. They focused on one area or project and briefly and efficiently laid out the specific details of that project. Some common characteristics of successful applications include:

- Focus was on one distinct project
- Demonstrated how target populations would be impacted significantly by the proposed project
- Performance measures that explained specifically how the project’s success would be measured
- Budget included only those costs necessary to implement the project
- Clearly explained the need, activities and results of the project

IV. APPLICATIONS WITH PARTIAL OR NO FUNDING

Common problems or issues raised during the review could be seen throughout numerous applications. Some recurring characteristics which resulted in lower scoring or partial funding of projects include:

- Performance measures that were vague or too general
- Budget appeared to include costs not necessary to implement the project, for example, excessive personnel, administrative or day-to-day operating costs
- Numerous projects submitted in one application, the brief 3 page limit often did not allow space to adequately describe each proposed project
- Applications that appeared to have a “shopping bag” of activities included, i.e. equipment purchases included with un-related project activities
- Un-realistic or overly-optimistic timelines for completing the project
- Projects or equipment that did not clearly fit within the scope of this grant, for example, activities that appeared to be tangentially emergency preparedness and more likely law enforcement

- Supplanting not addressed in the budget narrative for salary costs both in the personnel section of the budget as well as in the management and administration section
- Budget costs that were unallowable: construction, overtime/backfill, supplanting, etc.
- Incomplete application, missing attachments

V. CONCLUSION

There were several commonalities among the applications which received scores high enough to be awarded funding. Successful applications tended to focus on one project, had a realistic timeline, a conservative budget, and provided specific information about the activities that would be conducted. Most importantly, successful applications had a defined need that was addressed and the impact of fulfilling that need was presented in a clear and convincing way.